

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01

DRC-01 /144 W

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R 080808Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8013

INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, JA, KS

SUBJECT: IMPORT KOREANS FOR EMPLOYMENT ON OKINAWA?

SUMMARY: PRESS REPORTS GOJ TO SEEK ROK AGREEMENT FOR IMPORT OF OVER 5000 KORDUN WORKERS TO OVERCOME LABOR SHORTAGE IN CONSTRUCTION FOR OKINAWA '75 OCEAN EXPOSITION. OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES EXPECTED TO OPPOSE SUCH MOVE; LABOR UNIONS HAVE ALREADY GONE ON RECORD AGAINST IT. GOJ MAY FIND ITSELF CAUGHT BETWEEN URGENT NEED TO IMPORT WORKERS AND PUBLIC SENTIMENT AGAINST THE PRACKQICE. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESS NOV 7 REPORTED JAPANESE PRIME MIN TANAKA LAST WEEK BROACHED TO ROK PREMIER KIM POSSIBILITY OF KOREAN WORKERS BEING IMPORTED FOR EMPLOYMENT ON OKINAWA. TIGHT LABOR MARKET IN RYUKYUS AND TIGHT SCHEDULE IN CONSTRUCTION OF INTL OCEAN EXPOSITION (EXPO '75) FACILITIES GIVEN AS BASIS FOR PROPOSAL WHICH SO FAR IS INFORMAL. ACCORDING TO PRESS, GOJ LAB MINISTER AND DIR GEN OKINAWA DEVELOPMENT AGENCY WILL MAKE FORMAL REQUEST TO ROK FOR INITIAL 5000 WORKERS WITH POSSIBILITY TOTAL REQUIREMENTS MAY RISE TO 12,000.

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2. IN PAST YEARS OKINAWA HAS MET LABOR SHORTAGES, LARGELY

IN AGRICULTURE, BY RECRUITING TAIWANESE, AND, SINCE JAPAN'S
BREAK IN RELATIONS WITH ROC, KOREANS. CONGEN,
NAHA ESTIMATES ABOUT 200 KOREAN WOMEN NOW EMPLOYED IN HARVESTING
AND PROCESSING PINEAPPLES. BUT NEW PROPOSAL APPARENTLY FIRST
SUCH MASSIVE EFFORT SINCE WWII. PRIOR TO AND DURING WAR KOREANS WERE
BROUGHT TO JAPAN IN LARGE NUMBERS, SOMETIMES INVOLUNTARILY
TO WORK AT LESSDESIRABLE OCCUPATIONS. THIS SOMEWHAT DISCOMFIT-
ING PRECEDENT MAY SPARKRESISTANCE TO PROPOSAL. LABOR
GROUPS IN TOKYO ANDIN NAHA HAVE ALREADY GONE ON RECORD IN OP-
POSITION POLITICAL PARTIES. NOT
UNANIMOUSLY ENTHUSIASTIC OVER EXPOSITION, OKINAWAN PUBLIC
MAY ALSO OBJECT TO INTRODUCTION OF SUCH A LARGE, ALIEN LABOR
FORCE.

3. LABOR MINISTRY BUREAUCRACY APPAENTLY CAUGHT OFF BALANCE
BY THE PROPOSAL WHICH ALLEGEDLY APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE BY LAB
MIN KATO WITHOUT CONSULTING HIS STAFF.

4. COMMENT: CULTURAL HOMOGENEITY OF JAPANESE PEOPLE--WHICH IN
BROAD SENSE INCLUDES OKINAWANS--MAKES ACCEPTANCE OF FOREIGN
WORKERS MORE DIFFICULT FOR PUBLIC THAN IN WESTERN EUROPE OR US.
WHETHER THIS BECOMES SERIOUS POLITICAL ISSUE IS DOUBTFUL,
BUT FOR THE MOMENT GOJ AND "REFORMIST" GOVERNOR YARA OF
OKINAWA APPEAR CAUGHT BETWEEN EXPOSITION CONSTRUCTION
DEADLINES ON ONE HAND AND PREDICTABLE OPPOSITION TO THE IMPORT
OF FOREIGN WORKERS ONOTHER.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: EMPLOYMENT, CONSTRUCTION, FOREIGN RELATIONS, EXPO 75
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 NOV 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: elyme
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973TOKYO14556
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: TOKYO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19731145/aaaabhha.tel
Line Count: 88
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: elyme
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 NOV 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <14-Nov-2001 by willialc>; APPROVED <13-Dec-2001 by elyme>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: IMPORT KOREANS FOR EMPLOYMENT ON OKINAWA? SUMMARY: PRESS REPORTS GOJ TO SEEK ROK AGREEMENT FOR IMPORT OF
TAGS: ELAB, JA, KS, YQ
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005